From *How the Other Half Lives*

Jacob Riis

As business increased, and the city grew with rapid strides, the necessities of the poor became the opportunity of their wealthier neighbors, and the stamp was set upon the old houses, suddenly become valuable, which the best thought and effort of a later age have vainly strug­gled to efface. Their "large rooms were partitioned into several smaller ones, without regard to light or ventilation, the rate of rent being lower in proportion to space or height from the street; and they soon became filled from cellar to garret with a class of ten­antry living from hand to mouth, loose in· morals, improvident in habits, degraded, and squalid as beggary itself." It was thus the dark bedroom, prolific of un told depravities, came into the world. It was destined to survive the old houses. In their new role, says the old report, eloquent in its indignant denunciation of "evils more destructive than wars," "they were not intended to last. Rents were fixed high enough to cover damage and abuse from this class, from whom nothing was expected, and the most was made of them while they lasted. Neatness, order, cleanliness, were never dreamed of in connection with the tenant-house system, as it spread its localities from year to year; while reckless slovenliness, discontent, privation, and ignorance were left to work out their invariable results, until the entire premises reached the level of tenant-house dilapidation, containing, but not sheltering not, the miserable hordes that crowded beneath mouldering, water-rotted roofs or burrowed among the rats of clammy cellars.” Yet so illogical is human greed that, at a later day, when called to account, "the proprietors frequently urged the filthy habits of the tenants as an excuse for the condition of their property, utterly losing sight of the fact that it was the tol­erance of those habits which was the real evil, and that for this they themselves were alone responsible."

Still the pressure of the crowds did not abate, and in the old garden where the stolid butch burgher grew his tulips or early cabbages a rear house was built, generally of wood, two stories high at first. Presently it was carried up another story, and another. Where two families had lived ten moved in. The front house fol­lowed suit, if the brick walls were strong enough. The question was not always asked, judging from complaints made by a contempo­rary witness, that the old buildings were "often carried up to a great height without regard to the strength of the foundation walls." It was rent the owner was after; nothing was said in the con­tract about either the safety or the comfort of the tenants. The gar­den gate no longer swung on its rusty hinges. The shell-paved walk had become an alley; what the rear house had left of the garden, a "court." Plenty such are yet to be found in the Fourth Ward, with here and there one of the original rear tenements.

**ASSIGNMENT** Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(Turnitin.com)

RAFT Assignment (Role of the Writer, Audience, Format, Topic)

* Assume the role (**ROLE**) of a concerned citizen at the time of the tenement houses.
* Write an opinion newspaper article (**FORMAT**) to a local newspaper (**AUDIENCE**) where you express your concern for how these people are living.
* Focus on the horrendously bad living conditions and the safety issues the tenements present (**TOPIC**).
* Be sure to incorporate ***THREE*** direct quotes from the above reading (Cite will be (Riis 1) for all direct quotes and / or paraphrases)
* Limit your “letter to the editor” to only 150 words maximum (or it wouldn’t be published!) [**Cites will NOT count in your overall word count**]

